Okra, like cotton, belongs in the Mallow (Hibiscus) Family, Malvaceae, and like cotton too, its origins are shrouded in mystery. Kew Science suggests that its origins may have been in Africa, and there is evidence that it was grown in Egypt up to 4000 years ago. However, Kew Science suggests that its probable origins are India, Myanmar and Bangladesh. For all that, it is cultivated in many regions of the world.

Okra is a perennial plant, although often grown as an annual in tropical and subtropical regions, with edible green or red fruits that are harvested when they are young they’re famous for their slimy mucilage when pods are cooked. Pods can also been eaten raw or pickled and leaves are also edible, cooked or raw. During the American Civil War, the seeds were ground to provide a coffee substitute. Okra oil supposedly has a pleasant taste and is high in unsaturated fats.

Fibres from Okra stems have been studied as a potential reinforcing fibre in polymer composites.

Okra is not known in the wild, and is supposedly an allopolyploid. Its parentage possibly includes *Abelmoschus ficulneus*, *A. tuberculatus* together with another diploid form, hence it is referred to as a *cultigen*.

**Gumbo** is also a generic name for a stew from the southern United States, consisting of stock, meat or shellfish, a **thickener** which is usually okra, and celery, capsicums and onions and is believed to have first appeared in Louisiana in the early 18th century. Gumbo combines ingredients from multicultural origins: Choctaw Indian, Spanish, German, West African and French. Supposedly it is close to the French *bouillabaisse*. Okra fruit can be green and red (as in the example here): red okra turns green when cooked.


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